

CLAIMS

I claim:

1. A method of vending a fluid product comprising the steps of:
labeling a container with machine-readable indicia indicative of said fluid product;
distributing an original container for said fluid product;
dispensing said fluid product into said original container;
5 refilling said original container; and
producing a promotional coupon responsive to said dispensing of said fluid product into said container.
2. The method of claim 1 comprising the additional steps of:
selectively vending a plurality of containerized fluid products respectively into a plurality of original refillable containers from a single dispensing station, each of said plurality of fluid products having been originally vended in an original refillable container having machine-readable indicia thereon indicative of the fluid product in said original refillable container and the original sales price thereof prior to the first refilling thereof; and
dispensing a discount coupon for each refilling of ones of said plurality of original refillable containers with the matching fluid product which may be presented together with the matching refilled container.
3. The method of claim 1 further characterized by utilizing refilling apparatus comprising, in part, a vertically oriented fluid filling pipe having an outlet, being positioned over a filling opening in said original container, and connected to a supply of said fluid product, said filling pipe being

vertically movable with respect to said original container and being sized to freely enter said filling opening, said filling pipe being inserted into said container through said opening until said outlet is adjacent the bottom of said container and subsequently filling said container with a preselected volume of said fluid product.

4. The method of claim 1 comprising the additional step of providing, at the time of dispensing said discount coupon, at least one additional coupon.

5. The method of claim 1 comprising the additional step of providing, at the time of said dispensing of said discount coupon, a graphic display of information.

6. The method of claim 1 further characterized by said fluid product refilled into said container being blended from fluids stored in at least two containers.

7. The method of claim 3 wherein said filling pipe is connected to at least two supplies of fluid which are blended in said filling pipe to form said fluid product.

8. The method of claim 6 comprising the further step of polling a customer about whether to dispense optional ingredients.

9. The method of claim 8 wherein said optional ingredients are selected from the group of aromatic additives, flavorings, nutritional supplements and colorants.

10. The method of claim 9 wherein said optional ingredients comprise a plurality of available scents.

11. Apparatus for vending a containerized liquid product to a vendee utilizing an original container for said liquid product and, after said original container has been emptied of said liquid product, then vending multiple refillings of said liquid product in said original container, said container having machine-readable indicia thereon indicative of said liquid product and the original sales price of said container as filled with said liquid product prior to the first refilling thereof, and for each refilling of said container, dispensing to the refill vendee a discount coupon to be presented to the vendor's check-out, together with the refilled container, whereby the price charged to said vendee for said refilled container equals said original sales price less the value of said discount coupon, said apparatus comprising:

- a) a vertically-oriented liquid filling pipe having a discharge port at the bottom thereof and positioned over and in register with a filling opening in said original container, said container being positioned within a chamber with said machine-readable indicia oriented to be in register with indicia reading means;
- b) at least one bulk supply of liquid, and means controlled by said indicia reading means for initiating the transfer of fluid from said bulk supply of fluid to said liquid filling pipe and thence to said container; and
- c) means for sensing the complete filling of said container and for terminating said transfer of fluid, and for dispensing said discount coupon.

12. The apparatus of claim 11 further characterized by including a door means for closing off

said chamber and interlock means actuated by said door means, and means connecting said indicia reading means and said interlock means for controlling the transfer of fluid from said bulk supply of fluid to said container.

13. The apparatus of claim 11 wherein said vertically-oriented liquid filling pipe has a rack-gear attached thereto and engaged with a reversible pinion gear, said pinion gear being selectively operated by a motor, and said motor being controlled by said indicia reading means.

14. A method of distributing merchandise which benefits merchants through wider product distribution and beneficial association with another organization and which additionally benefits said organization, comprising the steps of:

generating a unique machine-readable code for said organization;
labeling a product container for said merchandise with said unique machine-readable code;
distributing said labeled product container to a member of said organization;
reading said machine-readable code;
filling said labeled product container; and
compensating said organization responsive to said reading step.

15. The method of claim 14 wherein said step of distributing said labeled product container comprises the further steps of:

providing said labeled product container to a contact within said organization; and
disbursing said labeled product container from said contact to said organization members.

16. The method of claim 14 wherein said step of compensating said organization comprises crediting said organization with a residual fee.
17. The method of claim 16 wherein said organization is a non-profit organization.
18. The method of claim 14 wherein said step of labeling comprises bar-coding said product container with a unique merchandise identification code and said unique machine-readable code.
19. The method of claim 14 comprising the additional step of generating a unique merchandise identification code identifying said merchandise within said product container.
20. The method of claim 14 wherein said filling step is responsive to said reading step.